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THE GEOGRAPHICAL DEVELOP- MENT OF BOSTON

By F. P. GULLIVER, PH. D.
of St. Mark's School, Southboro', Mass.

Reprinted from The Jour-
nal of Geography, Vol.
II., No. 6, June, 1903

Printed for the Editors by
RAND, McNALLY & COMPANY
CHICAGO

The JOURNAL of GEOGRAPHY

PUBLISHED MONTHLY, EXCEPT JULY AND AUGUST

*An Illustrated Magazine Devoted to the Interests of Teachers of Geography in
Elementary, Secondary, and Normal Schools*

Successor to the *Journal of School Geography*, Vol. V., and the *Bulletin of the
American Bureau of Geography*, Vol. II.

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THE JOURNAL OF GEOGRAPHY

Room 560, 160 Adams Street, Chicago, Ill., or Winona, Minn.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL DEVELOPMENT OF BOSTON

BY F. P. GULLIVER, PH.D.

Of St. Mark's School, Southboro, Mass.

THE crooked streets of Boston are said to follow the old paths along which the early settlers of the place drove their cows to and from their pasture on the common. However true this may be, it is certain that many of the main streets of the old city proper mark geographic features, formerly of importance, but now almost entirely forgotten. Atlantic avenue follows closely the original

shore line. Washington street preserves in its curves the old road along the narrow neck of land, which was the only connection for a long time between the mainland and Boston peninsula with its three hills which gave the name Tremont. Causeway street represents the dam to the earliest tidal mill pond, and Beacon street, the "Mill-dam," was built later to hold back the waters of Back Bay at high tide to be used for power at low tide. The curve of Park Square gives the shoreline of this Back Bay, where the fathers and grandfathers of the present generation used to put on their skates to glide over the area now occupied by Trinity Church and the Public Library.

In a very marked degree Greater Boston shows its physiographic control in its development. The hills, valleys, islands, marshes, estuaries, etc., have helped or hindered the settlement and growth of the many village sites which are now included in Metropolitan Boston. Many locations were made before 1650 around Boston bay, (See Map 1.) so that there were a large number of towns around the central "hub" at the foot of the three mountains which were later to be taken in to form the spokes of the wheel of greater Boston. Some portions of this area are still under distinct political governments, as Cambridge, Brookline, and Newton, but they no less truly form a part geographically of Metropolitan Boston.

The limits of the area of Greater Boston are variously drawn for different purposes. In order to show how the villages have grown together in the past and how they will continue to grow together in the future to form continuously inhabited areas, the ten mile limit from the State House has been adopted for this article; thus the following cities and towns are included: Arlington, Belmont, Boston, Braintree, Brookline, Cambridge, Chelsea, Dedham, Everett, Hyde Park, Lexington, Lynn, Malden, Medford, Melrose, Milton, Nahant, Needham, Newton, Quincy, Revere, Saugus, Somerville, Stoneham, Wakefield, Waltham, Watertown, Winchester, Winthrop, Woburn. (See map 5.) Portions of some of these towns are very thinly settled, but they all show growth from the centers toward their neighbors, along railroads or highways, so that the attempt to join is clearly seen. In the above list under Boston are included the following centers which had an independent beginning: Brighton, Charlestown, Dorchester, East Boston, Jamaica Plain, Roxbury, South Boston. In addition it must be remembered that many of the above towns began to grow in several places, and are therefore made up of several village sites. For example Newton includes the following centers of growth; Newton, Newton

Center, Newtonville, West Newton, Newton Highlands, Newton Upper Falls, Newton Lower Falls, Auburndale, and Waban.

It will readily be seen that one must have intimate knowledge of a large number of centers of growth of such an area as Greater Boston, in order to give with any degree of accuracy the real growth for periods of fifty years. The writer consequently presents with much hesitancy the results of his study of this region, knowing that on account of his incomplete knowledge of certain areas, many errors and inaccuracies have been included. Still the general impressions of growth

Scale: 10 miles = 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches.

MAP 1. *Greater Boston, 1900.*

and development as given in this series of maps from 1650 to 1900 are undoubtedly correct, and one can see how the estuaries and marshes have kept areas apart until bridges, filled land, and now elevated roads and tunnels, have connected them. Greater Boston can become a unit only by more complete connection between the isolated portions.

If there is interest enough in this series of maps to make it worth while to prepare a more exact set of maps, showing the increase of population for each period of fifty years from 1650 to 1900, the writer would be very glad to put the data together if some one from each town would undertake to look up the data for that town and record the

same on a series of large scale town maps, for each period of fifty years. This can be done only by some one who has access to the town records and has the knowledge of local buildings. Such a set of maps would be of great interest to each town, and would be worth recording for future comparison, when many of these local units have been swallowed up in the extension of Boston.

There are a great many points of interest in the past, present, and future development of Boston, as shown on these maps, only a few of which can be mentioned here. Old Boston was at first very much isolated from the surrounding towns, the only connection by land being the neck on the southwest side, across which all wheeled vehicles had to pass along what is now Washington street. (See maps 1 and 2.) Thus Roxbury and Dorchester were the two centers most closely connected with Boston for some two hundred years, and through them had to pass the stage coaches and produce-laden wagons from the towns to the west and south. A wagon to go from Cambridge to Boston had to start westward, and then go southward, and finally eastward through Roxbury across the neck.

By 1800, however, two bridges had been built to connect Boston

with the towns to the west and north, one to Cambridge and the other to Charlestown. (See map 3.) At first, communications had to be around by the neck or else by boat across the Charles or Mystic estuaries. These bridges brought a great deal of business from the north to the city, and the centers of population, Cambridge, Somerville, and Charlestown increased much more rapidly. By 1850 a second bridge had been built to Cambridge and a second to Charlestown. (See map 4.)

The filling in of the Back Bay and the reclamation of the tidal flats along the Charles river has been one of the greatest improvements of the past seventy-five years. By 1850, the mill-dam and two lines of railroad had crossed Back Bay, and considerable filling had been done on both sides of the neck. (See map 4.) Now in place of the narrow neck is a broad land connection to the south and west, and the city is built almost continuously across this area to Dorchester, Roxbury, Jamaica Plain, and Brookline. (See map 5.) The tidal flats on the Cambridge side of the Charles have also been filled, and building has commenced upon them.

MAP 4. *Greater Boston, 1880.*

The growth and extension of the wharf lines along the Boston, Charlestown, East Boston, and South Boston shore lines shows increased facilities for commerce. The plans for improvement around South Boston include the making of a good deal of new land and the formation of a marine park. There are a great many other signs of recent development which will not be mentioned here. There are, however, two great systems of improvements to which reference should be made. One of these is the extensive park and boulevard connections, which

will tend to make of the many village sites seen on the earlier maps a well coördinated city. An article on this subject by Mr. Shurtleff appears in this number of the *JOURNAL OF GEOGRAPHY*. Another very important factor in the unifying of Greater Boston is the work of the Metropolitan Water and Sewerage Board. Many millions of dollars have been spent in recent years to secure a system of water supply of the highest quality and to supply adequate means for carrying off the waste water. The equalization of water conditions for all the former village sites of the Metropolitan area will do a great deal toward bringing the separate communities together into a Greater Boston.

Scale 1:100,000

Map of Greater Boston, Mass.

THE JOURNAL OF GEOGRAPHY

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The Journal of Geography is an Illustrated Monthly Magazine devoted to the interests of teachers of geography in elementary, in secondary, and in normal schools. It is published the first of every month, excepting July and August.

Price The subscription price is one and one-half dollars a year, payable in advance. Twenty cents a copy.

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